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For chef Douglas Keane of Cyrus, holidays in Healdsburg mean small gatherings of family and friends.



Haute for the Holidays

Chef Douglas Keane of Cyrus restaurant in Healdsburg dresses his holiday table with truffle and spice—and everything nice

BY ALISON CLARE STEINGOLD



Chestnut and sherry soup



Persimmon and pomegranate salad



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ven the most cultured of California gents find good reason to angle their way out of kitchen duties: USC alums must support their beloved Trojans; teamless Angelenos feel a storied compulsion to watch the Oakland Raiders win (or for the bitter, lose).

Chef Douglas Keane, however, will find any excuse not to grab a beer cozy and put his feet up on the coffee table: For him, "holiday" and "game day" aren't inexorably interchangeable. "I was never a huge football fan. So whether it was Thanksgiving at Uncle Paul's or Christmas at our house," he explains, "I went into the kitchen instead. That's how I started cooking."

The fast-talking chef/owner of Cyrus restaurant in Healdsburg has come a long way since joining Sister Josephina's cooking class at his Catholic school outside of Detroit ("to get a prom

date," he confesses). At 37 years old, his wine country restaurant, co-owned with esteemed maitre d' Nick Peyton, is to Sonoma what French Laundry is to Napa: the best of the best. Keane, who graduated from Cornell's School for Hotel Administration and rose through the ranks of Lespinasse, Jardinière and Gary Danko, already holds two Michelin stars and the accolades of every gourmet glossy.

Christmas falls into the rare handful of days Keane marks with a big "X" through the reservation books. As much as he relishes the chefs' whites, he hangs them up for a laid-back day with his close-knit family—his wife, Lael; mother, Kathryn; brother, Chris, and his wife and two children; and the family of his mentor and "surrogate dad," hospitality guru Stan Bromley.

Amid the chillier crinkled-leaf beauty of Sonoma, the Michigan native feels right at home. From a dream setting off of Healdsburg's semi-beaten path—a place where the

mailboxes of each winding creekside road could very well lead to California's finest Pinot Noirs—Keane prepares his late-day feast. He begins the morning with a quiet walk through the wilder countryside of Healdsburg with his wife, then settles into the early afternoon with a first glass of sparkling wine from Sonoma favorite Iron Horse. >>



Sugar Pie pumpkin and maple tart

A Winter Feast

Tsar Nicoulai Select CA Estate Caviar

Roederer Estate "L'Ermitage,"
Anderson Valley, 2000

Iron Horse "Blanc de Blancs,"
Green Valley, 2002

Chestnut and Sherry Soup*

Bacon-Roasted Brussels Sprouts*

Persimmon and Pomegranate
Salad with Red Onion
and Roquefort

Roasted Fingerling Potatoes
with Garlic and Thyme

Whole-Roasted Dungeness Crab
with three sauces

Individual Sugar Pie Pumpkin
and Maple Tarts with
Cranberry Relish

Mulled Cider with Cardamom
and Cinnamon

* See recipes on page 140.





Whole-roasted Dungeness crab with three sauces



**"WITH FAMILY,
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In lieu of traditional holiday fare such as roast beef, turkey or duck, Keane builds his menu around Dungeness crab, which is fired in the pizza oven.



Dungeness crab peaks in winter



(So much for the sporting six-pack.)

At-home holidays for an haute chef have little to do with brand of extreme luxury for which Cyrus is revered. On this easygoing day, Keane cooks the way he likes to eat—simply and seasonally with fine-tuned ingredients and lavish leftovers. "You don't have to think too much about roasting potatoes or making casseroles," explains Keane. "With family, it's about eating, drinking, talking to each other and not worrying. We throw whole Dungeness crabs in the brick oven, sit around like the Europeans and talk. Everyone cracks the crabs right there at the table. My only worry is that my wife isn't stealing crab off my mom's plate."

Keane doesn't parade his signature champagne-and-caviar cart; he selects a favorite bubbly or two and one tin of pearlescent Tsar Nicoulai osetra from California's Central Valley. Instead of the five canapés ceremoniously presented each time a napkin is draped across one's lap, the chef serves the first

course—a velvety chestnut-sherry soup "ripped off a mind-blowing food and wine experience I had at Spago."

And finally, he doesn't bring home the plates and crystal as he does with newly launched Cyrus Private service—a painstaking replication of the restaurant for the home. "You could spend the entire holiday making everything just right. Last time I did that was with two ounces of white truffles. My mom's friend thought they were chocolate, picked one of them up like a piece of candy and ate it."

Still, it's the best day of the year. Luckily for Keane, the pursuit of perfection is only a day job. For him, family members are the

best kind of fanatic followers: They always root for the home cook, and they're far more forgiving than any Michelin inspector. (Or die-hard Raiders fan.)
29 North St.,
Healdsburg,
707-433-3311; cyrusrestaurant.com.